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ESSAY

M. E. Smith

ON

MORAL AND RELIGIOUS

EDUCATION

IN DOMESTIC LIFE.



BY THE AUTHOR OF "RESIGNATION," &c.



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ESSAY

ON

MORAL AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

What tender interests—what momentous results, are associated with this subject!—the pure and delightful sympathies of nature—the joy of angels—the destinies of immortal spirits—the approbation and the glory of DEITY! The judicious education of children, if regarded in relation to the present world only, in a political point of view, as tending to promote the interests of society, is an object of incalculable importance: one which in an early age of the world engaged the attention of the philosopher and the legislator. And shall not the moral culture of beings born for eternity, in this their forming season, their preparatory state, excite the most lively interest in the heart of the Christian, now that life and immortality are brought to light by the Gospel? Where is the good man who can regard with indifference the subjects of this moral culture?—where the disciple of Him who took little children into his arms and blessed them, that can view them only as the ephemeral subjects of an existence which death can terminate?—where the christian philanthropist, whose heart yearns not for their eternal happiness, to prepare for which, religious education, blessed by God, may be considered a means of omnipotent efficacy.

The infant heart *loves*, before the expanding powers of the infant mind can learn to *adore*; and this fact may lead to the conclusion that the moral education of children should commence before they are capable of receiving religious truth. That delightful principle of affection which a benevolent Deity has deeply implanted in the human heart, may be considered the first moral attribute developed in human character. How soon does the infant ear learn to distinguish the accents of maternal tenderness! How soon does the babe love the hand which fosters it,

before it can lisp the language of human intercourse, or even pronounce, simply, the endearing, the holy name of mother! Yes, the *holy* name of mother! for maternal love, that pure, deep, mysterious source of anxious tenderness, of yearning fondness, which language is impotent to express; which sorrow, and toil, and watching, and ingratitude, can never, in early, or in after life, destroy—that love is the vital law of our nature, which God, the great FIRST CAUSE, hath established for the preservation of the little children of his kingdom.

The affection which the infant so soon manifests towards its mother, may be made to exert a salutary moral influence, at a much earlier season than is generally supposed. It may, under the judicious direction of a Christian parent, be made the instrument of controlling those ebullitions of the will, or temper, which at a very early age are discoverable in the infant character. Who will deny the moral power which the maternal countenance might be made to exert over the babe, whose heaven-lighted eye, with a kind of intuitive discrimination, amidst all the fair and pleasant things which this goodly world presents to its newly-awakened vision, selects the mother, as an object dearer and lovelier than all besides:—whose smile, with the native intelligence of unreasoning affection, so delightedly hails her beloved countenance after an hour of absence. Should the mother assume a firm, serious aspect, at every manifestation of what may be called will, or temper, which in a babe of even a few months, often discovers itself in the full exertion of its little strength in struggles for the obtaining of its undefined wishes, would not an association be soon formed in the infant mind, between a sort of instinctive recollection of boisterous feeling, and an instinctive sense of disapprobation in the parent; a disapprobation felt by the babe, before it can be expressed or understood? By thus invariably manifesting a decided, though calm displeasure, when the infant discovers turbulent feeling, the mother may very early form it to a moral habit, a sort of intuitive discrimination between right and wrong, and a practice of self-denial, operating with a salutary influence on the *heart*, before the *mind* can understand the principle or its efficacy.

That exquisite capacity, or attribute, of the human soul, called *sympathy*, is also discoverable at a very early age. Where is the watchful guardian of infancy who has not witnessed the power of music, to excite in her little charge

feelings of sorrow or of delight? How does a sweet and plaintive air call to the infant countenance, already stamped with the impress of Deity, the expression of grief? How will its eye brighten at the sound of martial music! How evidently lulling are the soothing words and tune of the cradle hymn—nay, how does even the gentle voice of the mother, uttering to her little one, in low, plaintive tones, the language of pity, in moments when her maternal heart remembers with a sigh that “man is born to trouble”—how evidently does this sorrowful and gentle voice affect the babe!—how often, at such moments, will the trembling lip of infancy present its wordless grief, in language more pathetic, more touching, than words could ever utter! Now, can it be that this mysterious and delightful attribute of soul—source of such pure happiness in after life—deep fountain of generous feeling, of refined affection, of active benevolence—can it be that God, who hath made nothing in vain, hath given so early to the work of his hands, in its formation *fearful and wonderful*, this exquisite power of feeling, without intending that it should exercise an accompanying moral influence? Let the mother improve this talent, committed to her care for the good of her child, by forming its feelings to a moral taste. Let no sounds of discord,—of harsh and unkind language, affright the infant ear, or impart their roughening influence to the infant heart. Let the mother sing to her little one, in a soft, low voice, blessed words, pure and lovely sentiments; and see if these words and these sentiments; or rather, to the untutored sense, these *sounds* of peace, and love, and purity, will be lost. Let the language of the domestic circle be invariably that of kindness and affection, lest the infant heart and mind should commence their moral career with a disposition formed to a harshness, and irascibleness, induced by the unnatural and monstrous sounds of domestic discord.

At an early stage in the progress of heart and mind towards the formation of moral and intellectual character, the child may be led to view with disgust manifestations of meanness, or of a mercenary spirit, and to perceive the loveliness of generosity, and of an obliging and accommodating disposition. As soon as the child has learned to connect words and ideas, ingenious little fictions, founded on the known truths, the existing attributes of the human character, may be told in simple language, such as a very little child may understand, of selfish and naughty boys, who appropriated all that was good and pretty to them-

selves; and of sullen girls, who would do nothing to oblige their little companions. The lessons conveyed by such fictions, enforced always by a marked expression of disapprobation in the mother's countenance and manner, would insensibly form in the little auditors an abhorrence of selfishness, and a love of generosity and benevolence.

The formation of early character should never be left to the care of mercenary domestics, nor even to that of those more conscientious and elevated in their feelings; (though occasion is here taken to remark, that a decided preference should, in every instance, be given to attendants of the latter description, if only from the consideration that the example of such, in domestic life, is not without its influence. But to every reflective and virtuous mistress of a family, this truth must be too self-evident to render necessary an attempt to make it more indubitably apparent.) The mother is the natural guardian of her children.—She is their tutelar angel, the agent of their heavenly Father, whose word addresses her thus: “Take these children and nurse them for me.”—Nurse and cherish their intellectual and moral, as well as their animal nature, that they may be my children.—Thrice honorable distinction conferred on the maternal character! the work of educating deathless spirits for immortal glory!—for interminable felicity!—for an eternal home in the kingdom of God! Where is the heart which glows not at the thought! The mother!—who so fitted to guide her children in the paths of virtue and happiness!—God hath opened in her heart a deep fountain of unutterable tenderness. She lives in all the little lives which the great SOURCE OF BEING hath given her. The delights, the griefs, of infancy, are her own; for her heart-strings, with love which language cannot utter, are entwined around the spirits of her little ones. God has given her towards them a patient, an enduring love. She can toil, watch, die for them. This love she carries through all her pilgrimage—through evil report and through good report; through error and through crime, her untiring heart will weep for them, pray for them, and even in death remember and bless them. A mother's love! Can there be a human sentiment deeper and purer than this!

Let *Religious* education be commenced as soon as the child is old enough to have a definite and distinguishing conception of moral action. This capacity is discoverable in different children at different ages, as the dawns of intelligence gladden the watchful eye of parental love at an earlier hour of human existence in some children than in others. The writer, (though she seeks not to exercise

an undue influence over the sentiments of those far better qualified than herself to judge respecting the important subject of religious education,) would here venture to suggest the inexpediency of presenting to the mental vision of *very young* children those mysterious and sublime truths into which “angels desire to look,” and which surpass the understanding of finite minds, even (while dwelling in a tabernacle of flesh) the most matured, the most enlarged and elevated. To her it appears that the little child should not be led beyond its depth into the waters of life; but that the more simple truths in *Theology* which *come down*, if so it may be expressed, to the level and the compass of the reasoning power in children, should first be presented; and as the child evidently advances in his intellectual progress, others, as he is able to bear them, may be gradually unfolded to his strengthening vision, like the rising light, shining more and more unto the perfect day of divine knowledge. Let the little one, as soon as he is capable of understanding the delightful truth, be taught that there is One—a great and good Being, who seeth him continually, and who knoweth when he does wrong; and because the tender powers of early reason should not be exercised in matters too high for them, let the sublime truth that God is a *spirit*, whose presence fills immensity,—a truth which matured minds, though they may *believe*, and believing, bow in adoration, cannot comprehend, be *shaded* to the feeble eye of infant thought. Let the child be told, even in scripture language, that God *looks down* from heaven, his holy habitation, and seeth all his works continually; for the child is no *philosopher*: terms which are intelligible to his conception should be used; and he can understand the ideas of *above* and *below*, while those of *space* and *immensity* would perplex and bewilder him. Let the child learn to love God, by being taught that He is good to all,—that his tender mercies are over all his works,—that parents and friends, food and rest;—that the glorious light of the sun, the mild brilliance of the moon, the bright stars, and the soft breathing air of heaven;—that the beautiful verdure of the earth, and all things that are good and lovely, are the gifts of his beneficence:—that the little birds, the tender lambs, and “the cattle upon a thousand hills,” are the works of his hands:—that all things were made by him; and that all is his. Let the little one be taught that this great and good Being loves the obedient, sweet-tempered, pleasant child: that it is his will that all his creatures, even to the smallest insect, should be treat-

ed kindly; and that he is displeased with cruel, naughty children. Such teachings will have a tendency to form the feelings of childhood to a habit of tenderness and kindness. Let the disapprobation of this good Being be represented as the most dreadful evil which can befall children; and his love, and blessing, as the greatest, and best happiness, which they can possibly obtain. Let every duty which they can understand, and which, of course, may be considered as devolving upon them, be enforced by the holding up, as a motive, the truth, that its performance will please God, their heavenly Father, whom, not having seen, they should yet love and obey, because he is all that is good.

The credulity of the infant mind renders the making of salutary impressions, (and it may be added, such as will never be wholly effaced,) peculiarly easy. Could we trace those subtle, mysterious, undefinable associations, which in mature life often arise with an etherial influence in the heart, perhaps remotely inducing the performance of actions most important as they regard human happiness, we might often bless the influence of early instruction, as the originally operative means. Children are never sceptical. They will believe all which the judicious and pious parent teaches as *truth*, and though the fruit of such precious seed may not appear till the time of the latter harvest, the yearning heart, that trusts in the God of the harvest, may hope and believe that it will not be lost in the generous soil of the young mind, unsophisticated as yet by intercourse with that world, lying beyond the consecrated area of domestic life.

With regard to the truths presented by Scripture, besides that of the being and goodness of God, the watchful christian parent will judge respecting the seasons most proper for introducing them, remembering, in the imparting of nourishment to the intellectual powers, that the infant mind has need of *milk*; “strong meat belonging to them *that are of full age*, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised.”*

Some remarks may here be admitted respecting that faculty of the human mind, called *memory*, which in early childhood is remarkable for a sort of premature vigor, while the progress of the other mental powers is gradual, and in many cases imperceptible. The peculiar activity and retentive power of memory, in childhood, may be inferred,

* Heb. 5. 14.

not simply from the facility with which early lessons are committed, but also from the fact that incidents so destitute of apparent interest, that they make no lasting impression on matured minds, arresting the attention of a child, fix themselves so strongly, that at a subsequent, and comparatively remote period, they are brought into view, to establish a precedent, or for some other purpose, operating perhaps, immediately or remotely, on the character or happiness of the child. This fact alone, (could the high motives to undeviating integrity and virtue be prostrated,) should render the guardians of childhood peculiarly careful respecting their conduct in the presence of those so likely to be affected by their example. A mean action, or an unkind or immoral word, committed or uttered in the presence or hearing of a child, may operate with a dreadful influence on his character in after years. With regard, too, to the *exercise* of memory, a faculty capable of very early cultivation, there should be a care that the noble power be not abused: that subjects and words utterly unworthy this gift of God, be not presented to the cognizance of its active energies. Every thing offered to the mind of childhood in the form of a lesson, should be simple in its phraseology, pure in its sense, and useful in its tendency. A correct moral taste may be cultivated, even in very early life. How frequently has that natural love of harmony which renders the young memory peculiarly susceptible to the power of musical numbers, been abused by an overwhelming torrent of words, possessing no other than the wretched recommendation of an unmeaning jingle! A moral direction may in early childhood be given to the memory. All its exercises may be of a moral character; and still it may be improved, as far as is essential, to the purposes of healthful recreation and entertainment. Instruction may very often be blended with amusement, and thus conveyed, may make impressions which will be permanent. Rich treasures of knowledge, presented in a simple form, may be laid up in the heart—in short, the memory may be considered the foundation on which, at a very early season of human life, may be commenced the superstructure of a religious education. How glorious the hope, that by the blessing of the great Master Builder, *the headstone thereof shall be brought forth with shoutings of Grace, grace!**

* Zec. 4. 7.

The child should be taught to place an unlimited confidence in the affection of its parents. The entire trust of children is peculiarly desirable, since it gives the parent an advantage in the formation of character, the want of which no other advantage can compensate. Let the child doubt the love of its parents—let it fear to bring its troubles, its wants, its errors, to the sanctuary of the parental bosom, and distrust, concealment, and falsehood, will be the result. It should learn that the parent delights in granting all its innocent wishes, that no good thing will be withheld without an adequate reason; and by the habitual manifestation of this truth, the child will be made a subject of *Faith*. He will believe that the parent is kind; and he will not fear to impart his wishes, knowing that they will be gratified if this can be done consistently with the parent's views of what is right. Every reasonable request should be granted, when the indulgence is not opposed to the real good of the child, and the duty of the parent; and it should be impressed as an absolute truth, that the wish will always be answered if there be not good reasons for denial. Where such reasons can properly be explained, it is perhaps advisable to make the explanation; but where this cannot be done, the child, if its education have been so far well directed, will believe and know that some good reason against its gratification *does* exist; that its parent knows best, and that nothing more is to be said on the subject. The denial should not be given till there is a decided conviction of its propriety; and then the parent should be firm; because a change of mind would suppose a liability to error, and this would weaken his authority. Children should never be suffered to gain their point by teasing, or by tears. One instance of success arising from such rhetoric would not only open the way for future trouble of this nature, but would tend also to render the child fretful and unamiable.

Parents may teach implicit obedience by forming in the minds of their children the association of disgust and horror, with the thought of the opposite vice. Here, again, little fictions, or if the word be offensive, simple parables, may be introduced, exhibiting the dreadful nature of disobedience. In the same manner may be inculcated the love of truth, and every other virtue. Let falsehood, for instance, be presented to the young mind, (the countenance and manner of the mother, as well as her words, expressing marked disapprobation and grief) as a mean, and odious, and very wicked thing, displeasing to God, and to all good peo-

ple; and the child will learn to hate falsehood; and the association thus formed between the vice, and the disapprobation and hatred, will be so powerful, that after years will witness its influence on the character. Care should be taken to create, and to keep alive in the young heart, a delicate, moral sensibility. The child may be early taught that deceit, if not the *letter*, constitutes the *spirit*, of falsehood: that anger is a violation of that law which saith "Thou shalt not kill"—and that a disregard to the known wishes of parents, is *disobedience*, "Line upon line, and precept upon precept," should be given, in the spirit of all-enduring love. Let the parent remember that God hath said, "These words which I command thee shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children; and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way; and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." Occasion may be taken, from passing incidents, and existing circumstances, to inculcate pleasant and precious truths. In every walk with her children, as they witness the smiles of nature; and amidst the tranquil charms of domestic scenes, the mother may direct their thought to the goodness of God, and the beauty of virtue and benevolence; and by a blessing on her instructions, their young hearts may be formed to a habit of gratitude to the Great Giver of all good, and to a character distinguished by a spirit of universal love.

By a judicious selection and introduction of some of the touching, beautiful, and impressive narratives contained in the Scriptures, children may be prepared to love the Bible, before their power of discrimination is such as to render expedient a permission to read it for themselves. These narrations may be given as facts, recorded in a book which must be true, because it is the word of God; and the children may be told that if they are very good, this most delightful and best of books will one day be granted them, as a very precious reward. By thus giving the Bible its appropriate distinction, and by withholding it for a time, as something too excellent and too beautiful to be afforded them at a very early age, a reverence, as well as love for it, will be formed in their hearts, which may preserve a blessed influence through their subsequent lives.

As, in a judicious system of education, rewards may properly be admitted as an encouragement to good conduct, a few remarks relating to this subject will here be introduced. To very young children, who are not yet capable of appreciating intellectual happiness, rewards suited to their ca-

capacity of enjoyment as partaking of an animal nature, may be offered, because such rewards, at such a period, may produce a moral effect more readily than those of a higher character. Sugar-plums, or a cake, for instance, presented as a token of the parent's approbation, and accompanied by a smile, and the words, *good child*, because the little one has given up a toy to its brother, or because it has resigned to the will of its mother some object which she had deemed an improper plaything—Such a reward, though suited to its animal sense of enjoyment, may not prove destitute of influence in preparing the child to form habits of generosity and obedience. But when the voice of approbation, *alone*, can cause the little heart to thrill with rapture—When the capacity of enjoyment is enlarged, refined, and elevated; other, and better gifts, should be offered as rewards. Let them, from such a period, be connected with intellectual or moral feeling, lest the animal nature acquire an ascendancy over the spiritual, the nobler part. Let a reward of good conduct be presented in the form of a book, and the mind may very readily form an association between the ideas of knowledge and happiness. Let a child be permitted to accompany its mother on her visits of charity—let it witness the delighted smiles of the poor inhabitants of some rude hut, or the expression of grateful joy on the countenance of sickness and distress, at the reception of kindness—let these indulgences be granted as *rewards*, and the child will soon learn to regard charity as a delightful principle, as a virtue happy, and lovely, and blessed; and habits of kind feeling, and active benevolence, may thus insensibly be formed.

In the exercise of essential discipline, too, there should be a care that a counteracting influence be not produced by the *method* of punishment. Should a long lesson be given as an expression of displeasure against idleness, knowledge might forever lose its charm. Instead of sending a child supperless to bed, for a fault, thus implying that a supper is a most delightful indulgence, and thus cherishing unduly the animal nature, let it be told, that for such a fault, (if it be almost a *capital* one,) it will be deprived of the privilege of attending the public worship of God on the approaching Sabbath, or of joining its brothers and sisters in singing their beautiful evening hymns; and a connexion may thus be formed, in the early process of thought, between happiness and piety, between ill conduct and the misery of being deprived of religious privileges. Punishment should be proportioned to the degree of wrong feeling inducing the offence. The child should ever expressly understand

that the parent is grieved at the necessity of *causing* grief; and the parent, in the exercise of essential discipline, should be firm, yet kind, never discovering anger; but manifesting sorrow for the naughtiness of her child.

In her general conduct the mother should be consistent—always consistent, always kind: dignified, yet cheerful; condescending, yet maintaining a proper authority—at once the guardian, the guide, the friend, the companion of her little ones; and a look of disapprobation from a parent so worthy of reverence and of love, will possess a far more powerful moral influence than the rod—nay, it is to be presumed that where the moral education is commenced at the proper season—even in infancy; where it is conducted with wisdom and firmness, and blessed by Him without whom *Paul must plant and Apollos water in vain*, corporal discipline will *never* be necessary. The intention of punishment should be the improvement of moral character. Why then should not the *methods* of punishment be of a moral *nature* addressed in their application to the moral *powers*? We would improve the mind and the heart; and cannot this be done without torturing the flesh?—But, it may be objected that the wisest of men has recommended this method of discipline. To this objection it may be replied, that in the days of Solomon the education of children did not commence, perhaps, till (the days of infancy having passed) the will had attained a degree of strength and resolution requiring harsher methods of government than those addressed simply to moral feeling. Is not every principle with which we are acquainted in the natural, intellectual, or moral world, progressive? As man advances from a state of barbarism to the polished usages and the cultivated arts of civilized life, is there not an immense improvement in his feelings, his manners, and his habits? Mind is progressive;—character is progressive; and why, amidst the multiplied and wonderful improvements of the present day, applied in their objects to the *present* temporal comfort of man,—why should there not be a proportional degree of improvement in relation to that most important subject, connected in its results with the happiness of future generations, and the bliss of heaven? What, in the days of Solomon, might have been a wise direction, applied to the circumstances and the characters of his day, might not apply with equal, if with any propriety, to those of our own time. This remark is not intended to convey an opinion that human nature is not now what it then was; but the *circumstances* of the world have changed.

Since the reign of Solomon, in his unrivalled wisdom and glory, the *sun of righteousness* has arisen upon our world with *healing* in his beams. That epistle of love, the Gospel of peace, has been sent down from heaven. In the records of that wonderous epistle, we learn that He whose nature is benevolence, took little children into his arms and blessed them. In that epistle christians are addressed under the figure of *little children*. The wise commands, the gracious exhortations, the kind reproofs, the endearing invitations and promises contained in that epistle, are now to be applied to the children of believers, as they are able to receive them; and their directions and influence, governing the conduct of parents, and blessed by God, are sufficient for “doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness.” How many generous and high-souled children have been injured, if not ruined, in their moral feelings, by the exercise of undue severity!—by the stern rebuke—and the cruel eye. Children should always be treated kindly—*always*, even in discipline. The heart is the native element of affection; and let this innate, deeply implanted principle be called only *natural* affection, (if this admission be essential,) destitute as yet of the refining influence of heavenly grace, still it is a powerful principle.—It was given for wise purposes; and it may be successfully operated upon for the promotion of a moral object. Let an affectionate child, (and every one is more or less so,)—let an affectionate, though, proud child, of strong, and even of rebellious feeling, be taken to the closet of his mother—let him witness her tears for his offences—let him hear the tender words, the gentle and grieved breathings of her prayer that the good Being, his heavenly Father, of whose love and whose wisdom she has often told him, would forgive, and bless, and make him a good child, and will not the proud and naughty heart yield to the influence of such a scene, where anger and severity might but excite it to more determined rebellion?

In considering the subject of education, almost exclusive reference has hitherto been made to the influence of the mother; for on her the government and instruction of children, during their earliest years, may be considered as almost exclusively depending. While one parent is engaged in the toils and the cares of public life, *home* is the peculiar and appointed sphere of the other. Here she moves in the mild beauty of virtue and affection, watching and cherishing those moral flowers, haply to bloom forever in

the garden of the Lord. Domestic life is woman's element, where she should ever move, calm, dignified, kind, the guardian angel of nature's holy charities. But it is not meant that both parents are not deeply concerned in the education of their children. Very many opportunities will be presented to the affectionate father, to enforce, by precept, and example, the instructions of the more domestic mother. Parents should walk before their children *as heirs together of the grace of life*; and it may be hoped that powerful indeed will be the influence even of their silent example. No opposing or separate interests; no discordant sentiments should ever be suffered to appear—O they should never, never exist, between those whom God has joined together in a connexion so sacred, so endeared, that in his word it is used metaphorically, to denote that vital bond uniting Christ and the Church which he has purchased with his own blood! Harmony of sentiment and of conduct, in the government of a family, is peculiarly desirable and beautiful. Religious family order is most salutary in its influence on the young mind and heart. Will not the one perceive a beauty in that piety which brightens the smile of parental affection; and will not the other feel the power of that lovely principle which renders domestic life, (the birth place of the heart,) an abode of peace?—And in after years, when the cherished ones shall go out on their pilgrimage into the world's wilderness,—O will they not remember—(and will not God bless to them the remembrance)—the tenderness of parental counsel, and the prayers which ascended from the consecrated family altar for their sanctification and eternal happiness?—Will not the recollection, as a holy amulet, guard their hearts amidst the trials and dangers of their path?

In considering the subject of a religious education, the question presents itself: May christian parents conform in any degree to the spirit of the world, in relation to fashionable accomplishments? This question, as far as it refers to this conformity for *its own* sake, may be immediately answered. “Be ye not conformed to this world,” is a direction which the christian is bound to regard. In conformity to the spirit of the world then, for its own sake, christians should not educate their children as worldly people educate theirs. But it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine that ornamental accomplishments may not, in the education of children, come within the compass of a Christian's care. The writer asks not to influence the conduct of those who on this subject may differ

from herself; but if she may be permitted to express her own opinion respecting the admission of fashionable ornamental accomplishments, as making a proper part of education, she acknowledges herself an advocate for those, especially, which are considered as belonging to the Fine Arts, as far as their acquirement may be consistent with that of more solid, useful, and important branches. A due attention to them is calculated to improve the taste, and so far, at least, they may be considered useful, as a refined and elegant taste, may be regarded as possessing an influence on the purity of moral character. Where is the heart truly alive to the harmony of numbers, and the charms of melody, which can descend from the pure and elevated enthusiasm of its feelings, to the love of mere worldly enjoyments. A taste for any particular accomplishment, innocent in itself, and in its tendency, may be considered as evidence of a talent, which should be cultivated, the improvement of which, may in its result, be rendered useful. Music may be called the handmaid of piety. How eminently is it calculated to sooth, refine, and elevate the feelings! It forms a delightful part of the worship of God on earth. In the days "of the sweet singer of Israel," various musical instruments were used as a medium of praise: in the old Testament their employment as such is recommended or commanded; and in the sublime Apocalypse, music, vocal and instrumental, is represented as making a part of the holy employments, and pure joys of the Redeemed. Music, like other lovely gifts of heaven, may be abused; but surely in its native refinement, it constitutes one of the purest and sweetest sources of enjoyment with which a kind parent has gladdened the pilgrimage of human life.

A knowledge of the art of painting, too, may be considered a useful acquirement, not only in the purposes to which it may be applied; but also in its tendency. In this imperfect state, where it was not intended that the energies of mind should press forward without weariness in the eternal path of scientific research, or wander with untiring delight amidst the rich fields of literary pursuit, we may be permitted occasionally to rest in the beautiful parterres of nature; to gather her fair and brilliant flowers; to copy in unfading hues their transient loveliness--to secure the quiet beauty, or the rude grandeur of scenes from which we may one day be removed; and to draw delightful lessons from a transcript of those eloquent manifestations of soul, exhibited by the human countenance. Such employ-

ments may refresh our spirits for the arduous duties, or the sober and incumbent pursuits of life. We must not love them so well as to suffer them to interrupt the course of duty; but as this caution may properly be applied to every pleasant gift of earth, its expedience furnishes no argument against the acquiring of accomplishments which may prove sources of innocent enjoyment, provided that no object more important in its nature and tendency be sacrificed for the possession of such accomplishments. With reference to most of the ornamental branches considered as belonging to a finished education, it may be farther observed that accomplishments which at the first view may be regarded as *merely* ornamental, may frequently in their use be consecrated to noble and excellent purposes. Let works of mercy arise from the possession of such accomplishments—let the elegant specimens of female taste be “sold for much, and given to the poor”—let sums arising from such sales obtain for the ignorant the WORD OF LIFE, that they may have treasure in heaven—let these fair offerings, with the incense of that love which *is the fulfilling of the Law* be laid on the altar of Christian charity, and the time spent in the acquirement of ornamental accomplishments need not be regarded as lost. The pursuit of knowledge is a duty.—our talents are to be cultivated—every species of innocent and useful information is desirable—and where the attainment of elegant accomplishments does not interrupt pursuits more immediately connected with the cultivation of the intellectual powers, and the improvement of moral and religious character, it may with propriety be asserted that it is no matter how extensively, or in how great a degree of perfection, these accomplishments are acquired.

There is another branch of fashionable education which has not yet been brought into view—and as many professed christians consider it exceptionable, perhaps more so than any other ornamental accomplishment, it may be well to make a few remarks on the subject. Dancing, considered *simply in itself*, may be regarded as a perfectly innocent, and even salutary amusement—and where a knowledge of its rules can be acquired without an accompaniment of those circumstances which form the principle ground of objection to the accomplishment this knowledge may be considered even desirable. But when dancing is viewed as a *branch of education*, the acquirement of which must involve much expense of time and of money, which might be appropriated to the advancement of objects dear

to all good beings,—when it is considered that the regular teaching of this accomplishment, in schools exclusively devoted to this teaching, may prepare the young heart to love the frivolities, and even the dissipation of fashionable life,—when especially it is remembered that by giving their deliberate sanction to this public teaching of an accomplishment, viewed by many as at least of *doubtful* character, Christian parents may wound some of the friends of Zion, and cause many a spy in the spiritual Canaan to say what do ye more—or rather what do ye *less* than others,—as “whatsoever is not of *faith* is *sin*,” let the parent who doubteth on this subject be *fully established in his own mind*, when he concludes to admit dancing as an *essential branch* of his children’s education. The advocates for this accomplishment may say that it furnishes a source of healthful and most agreeable exercise, and that it gives a polish to the manners. With regard to these apologies for the public dancing school; to the first it may be replied, that the buoyant and active spirit of youth, will readily devise means of essential exercise. Nature is a practised, if not a professed teacher. She gives elasticity to the step, and grace to motion; and the young may occasionally dance in the happiness of their undisciplined hearts, without sin and without reproach, and yet never involve their more responsible parents in, to say the least, the *possible* sin and reproach of a sanction, which the spirit of pure religion may not approve. In reply to the second anticipated argument, in favor of dancing, *as a branch of education*, it may be observed that refinement of feeling, sweetness of disposition, and elegance of mind, (and these inborn graces may be cultivated out of the dancing school) will induce a refinement and grace of manners. Genuine politeness, arising from that courtesy of feeling which seeks to impart happiness, may exist in as great a degree of perfection in the cottage, as in the habitation of the wealthy and accomplished. But where it is difficult to draw the line of duty, let not opposing opinion prove the severance of that dear bond which should unite the followers of one Lord. ‘Let not him that eateth, despise him that eateth not, and let not him which eateth not, judge him that eateth.’ *To his own master the christian stands or falls.*

As the early example of society may be considered particularly connected with the forming of a moral taste in children, and as thus involving in no small degree their happiness and safety in after life, let it not be regarded as an object of minor consequence. That inordinate thirst for gay

amusements which is but too frequently manifested by the children of christian parents, and which crowds the scenes of fashionable dissipation with the thoughtless, the *immoral* seekers of happiness, that in its purity, such scenes can never supply, may be regarded as originally induced by the character of early associates,—a character formed by the example of parents who educate their children *for this world*; and by those circumstances of early indulgence which create a fondness for the gay party, and the crowded ball room. Let the children of parents more elevated in their feelings and views, be accustomed, as soon as they arrive at a proper age for admission into company, to the charms of elegant conversation, and the delightful communion of refined, virtuous, and cultivated minds; and it may be hoped that they will come forward in life prepared to regard as tasteless the frivolities of fashionable scenes. Let them not be introduced to such scenes till their taste is formed, and their judgment matured, and if it then be considered proper it may be done with *comparative* safety.

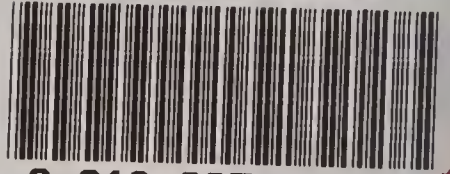
The attention is now led to the question, if christian parents can conscientiously give their sanction to the gay amusements of the world, by allowing their children to partake of such amusements. Here it cannot be decided that a *total* seclusion from scenes which perhaps the vivid fancy of youth has decked with a thousand bright imaginings, would be advisable. *Occasional* intercourse with the gay world may not be without its moral advantages, to those who are guarded from its specious snares by the panoply with which a well conducted education has invested them. A heart that has been refined by the teachings of virtue, will carry into the world an antidote to the poison of worldly pleasure. The young, by a seclusion from fashionable scenes, till their taste and judgment, having acquired a moral power of discrimination, can determine and appreciate the respective characters of true and false enjoyment, may perhaps be allowed to enter the fashionable world, not as residents; but as occasional visitors, that if Fancy have given that world a delusive colouring, Experience may disenchant it, thus rendering less dangerous to the moral character a taste of its unsubstantial pleasures, than would be a false estimate of its power to confer real happiness. A season must arrive when the children of christian parents should be permitted to think and act for themselves. At such a season parents must resign, in a degree, their appropriate authority, and where they may hitherto have forbidden the

partaking of amusements, which they may consider injurious in their moral tendency, they should now allow their children freedom of opinion, and privilege of choice, still counselling and watching over them in love. In the world the young heart will meet some of those trials of virtue to endure which religious education is the best preparative. Let parents cultivate in their children, from their earliest years, that purity of moral feeling, that refinement of moral taste, which will cause them to shrink from every approach of vice, from the slightest breathing of immorality. Let the heart be *prepared* to meet the dangers of the world, and from that unsatisfying world it will turn for peace to its home in domestic life—a home consecrated by the sympathies, and brightened by the smile of virtue; and cheered by the constant manifestation of affection, that well-spring of domestic happiness.

Let parents seek wisdom at its GREAT SOURCE for direction in the arduous, yet delightful, work, of training their children for usefulness, happiness, and immortality. Let them go on steadily and patiently in the way of well doing, inculcating, by precept and example, the love and the practice of every virtue; and it may be hoped, that by the blessing of God, on the means of moral, intellectual, and religious improvement, the rising generation, will present a manifestly living advancement of HIS KINGDOM on earth.

The momentous work of education belongs, in its influence, and its results, to ETERNITY!

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